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TSA: Unlock your baggage

'Living in a significantly heightened security environment'

Thursday, December 19, 2002 Posted: 10:24 PM EST (0324 GMT)

JACKSONVILLE, Florida (CNN)
— The Transportation Security Administration appealed Thursday to travelers not to lock their checked luggage.

As part of the TSA's new bag-screening policy, security agents will sometimes do hand searches of bags that trigger alarms without the owner being present.

"We have no choice but to open any bags that raise concern," Adm. James Loy, TSA undersecretary of transportation for security, told reporters at Jacksonville International Airport, one of the nation's first to install the screening equipment.

The request comes as the nation's commercial airports are working to meet a December 31 congressional deadline to do screening for explosives on all luggage checked at the nation's commercial airports.

The TSA is asking airline passengers to close their bags with the plastic ties typically used to ensure that garbage bags don't spill their contents.

Soon, travelers will be given free, tamper-evident seals with which to secure their bags, Loy said. "But, for now, I advise passengers to get their own."

Security agents will put a card inside each bag they have searched, indicating it has been opened and inspected, and the bag will then be resealed, he said.

Complaints of pilferage will be handled "on a case-by-case basis" by the airline, the TSA and the airport working

Passengers are being asked to use plastic ties for now, rather than locks on baggage. Soon, tamper-evident seals will be available.

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VIDEO

U.S. transportation officials say they'll meet their goal of inspecting all luggage at domestic airports. CNN's John Zarrella reports (December 19) 



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together, he said.

In cases where suspect luggage is locked, "we'll open it," said TSA Spokesman Brian Turnail. If, in doing so, the bag is damaged, "we are not liable," he said.

Among tips Loy listed for helping passengers move more quickly through security, he pointed out that a list of prohibited items for carry-on bags — including scissors, pocketknives and other sharp items — is posted on the agency's Web site. These items can be put into checked bags.

Price tag: \$2-2.5 billion

Legislation requiring that checked luggage be screened was passed in the aftermath of the September 11 terrorist attacks in which four commercial jets were hijacked and crashed into the World Trade Center, the Pentagon and a field in Pennsylvania, killing about 3,000 people.

"The events of a year ago still echo hauntingly often in our minds," Loy said. "We are, in fact, living in a significantly heightened security environment."

He added, "If each of us does our part, we'll make travel safe and pleasant for everyone this holiday season."

Of the nation's 429 commercial airports, approximately 325 already have set up their baggage-screening programs, and the others will have a system working by the end of the year, Loy said.

But a number of airports will not have automated systems in place by the deadline. They will be allowed to use equipment that detects traces of explosives, and to make use of dogs and hand searches to accomplish the task. "In all cases, all bags will be being checked," Loy said.

He declined to say which airports have yet to automate the search procedure. "Those are, I believe, steps in the direction of offering the bad guy information that I'm not going to be the one that ever tells them."

Loy estimated the cost of setting up the program nationwide at \$2 billion to \$2.5 billion.

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CHECKED BAGGAGE PACKING TIPS

- Don't put food or beverages in checked bags.
- Don't stack books — spread them out.
- Put footwear on top of other items.
- Leave gifts unwrapped.
- Put personal items into clear plastic bags.
- Don't put film into checked bags — explosive-detection equipment may damage it.
- Don't overpack.

Source: TSA

Bruno, a bomb-sniffing dog checks luggage with his partner Gaylnn Sonius Dallas-Fort Worth International Airport in Texas.

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